

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT ATTEMPTING TO RESTORE ALLIGATORS IN SOUTHEASTERN ARKANSAS, MISSISSIPPI

The Interior Department will attempt to restore alligators to their former habitat in southeastern Arkansas and Mississippi, it was announced today.

The program will begin in April when three surplus alligators from the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C., will be flown to Columbus, Miss., for release on nearby Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, managed by Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

Other zoos are expected to have surplus gators in the future that can be used for transplanting, and another source of supply will be the dozen national wildlife refuges which already possess this endangered reptile.

A plan to capture alligators last fall at Yazoo refuge in Mississippi for transplanting at Noxubee and White River refuge in Arkansas failed when the elusive animals slipped out of an expected area of capture.

Noxubee is a natural area to begin the restoration of alligators. The 45,750-acre refuge in east-central Mississippi is a forest interspersed with occasional fields, streams and roads. The Noxubee River traverses the area, and there are two major lakes ideal for alligators.

In addition to the thousands of waterfowl which use the refuge, bald eagles are seen in the area.

The three transplanted alligators, each five or six feet long, first will be fed a diet of frozen fish identical to the one they have in the zoo. Bureau biologists hope they gradually will shift to natural live fish of the area.

Previous alligator transplants often have been successful--when these water-loving creatures are protected from natural hazards and from poachers who get fancy prices for gator skins.

Last September, the Bureau and the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission cooperated in transplanting 210 alligators from Sabine National Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana to a marsh area southeast of New Orleans.